

PSYCHOLOGY TEACHERS UPDATE

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NEW THEORETICAL IDEAS

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PSYCHOLOGY TEACHERS UPDATE

Psychology Teachers Update is designed to give a brief overview of the main developments in the different areas of psychology. There is a proliferation of journals and research, and it is very difficult to keep abreast of the latest trends, particularly in the many and varied areas of psychology.

Each issue of Psychology Teachers Update will cover a particular topic, and summarise the main research directions and findings in the last ten to fifteen years approximately. The aim is to give teachers the feel of what is happening in that area of psychology.

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A complete list is available at
<http://kmbpsychology.jottit.com>.

PAST ISSUES

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- No.2 - January 2003: Evolutionary Psychology
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SOCIAL PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

The social psychoanalytic (or psychosocial) approach is a modern development within psychodynamics. Using some of the principles of psychodynamics, like the role of the unconscious, this approach adds a social dimension (derived from social constructionist ideas) (figure 1).

It is "attentive to the co-presence of the psychic and social dimensions of human behaviour, in a resolutely non-reductive fashion. This means specifying their joint effectivity on a person's meanings and actions" (Hollway and Jefferson 2005a p147).

Traditional Psychodynamics

Early experiences/
unconscious processes → Current behaviour

Social Constructionism

Discourses/language → Current understanding
of behaviour

Social Psychoanalytic Approach

Past experiences → Current → Behaviour
+
Discourses/language processes/
discourses

Figure 1 - Social psychoanalytic approach compared to traditional psychodynamics and social constructionism.

So, for example, unconscious processes influence the "identity positions" taken by the individual. But unconscious processes are seen as less deterministic or reductive than earlier psychodynamics. Hollway and Jefferson (2005b) preferred to talk of unconscious dynamics (processes) because "the unconscious" implies an entity.

While concepts like "identity positions" are from social constructionism and the emphasis on language constructing behaviour. An "identity position" is like a role available for a person to take in particular social situations.

The concepts of choice and agency are crucial. Rather than choice, the concept of "investment" is used

(Hollway 1984). The social psychoanalytic approach attempts to get away from the dualism of the autonomy-determinism that has existed in psychology. This approach objects to determinism (for being reductionist), and to autonomy (because behaviour is not rational and freely-chosen).

For the social psychoanalytic approach it is more about conflict, and the interaction of the "psychic" and the social:

This idea that meanings are mediated by psychic dynamics entails, first taking into account how current choices signify through biography (in which social events and discourses were, in their turn, mediated by psychic events) and, second, paying attention to how current social experiences are mediated by defensive psychic organisations (both intra- and inter-psychic)
(Hollway and Jefferson 2005a p150).

Lucey (2007) highlighted the principles of the social psychoanalytic approach as:

- i) Emphasis on the "dynamic, relational and inseparable nature of psychological and social life to look at how subjectivity emerges in the social domain" (p80);
- ii) Analysis of unconscious processes;
- iii) Studying how strategies to avoid anxiety are behind the construction of "individual, social, cultural and institutional lives";
- iv) Bringing together concepts of the interior processes of the human mind and external processes from the social world;
- v) Using only qualitative methods that allow individuals to speak freely.

CASE STUDY OF VINCE

Methodology

A major article (and responses) for the social psychoanalytic approach appeared in the British Journal of Social Psychology in 2005. It contains details of the case study of Vince (Hollway and Jefferson 2005a).

The case study method here is a combination of methods. It is not the full biographical case study as used in traditional psychodynamics, but a limited version combined with a deeper textual analysis (than

traditionally used in discourse analysis).

Two interviews (each one and a half hours long) were conducted with the participant (given the pseudonym "Vince"). The underlying assumption of the method is that the participant's "inner world is not simply a reflection of the outer world, nor a cognitively driven rational accommodation to it..(which) cannot be known except through another subject; in this case the researcher" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000 p4).

In the tradition of psychodynamics it is the analyst (or researcher) whose interpretations of what is said by the participant that counts. There is also reference to transference and counter-transference. For example, in the case of the latter, this produced disagreement between Wendy Hollway (who conducted the interview) and Tony Jefferson (from listening to the audiotapes) over whether Vince was unassertive or timid. Hollway admitted feeling "suspiciously protective" of Vince, while Jefferson was critical of his timidity (Hollway and Jefferson 2005a).

The interview method used has been christened "Free Association Narrative Interview" (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). The main focus is upon free association by the interviewee to the questions asked. Free association gets away from the production of "an overly coherent life story" (Hollway 2007).

In other words, let them talk about what they want, and the interviewer will interpret the underlying meanings. What the interviewee says cannot be taken at face value because, in the psychodynamic tradition, individuals are "defended subjects". This means that individuals "construct" conscious pictures of the world that protect themselves from the unconscious anxiety.

How is this method different to psychoanalysis as therapy? In the latter, analysts "interpret into the encounter, whereas researchers will save their interpretations for outside it" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000 p77). In other words, researchers make their interpretations away from the interviewee, and do not necessarily tell the interviewee about them. I feel that there are issues here in relation to the researcher knowing best as to what is the "truth".

The FANI also uses some principles of textual analysis to "make visible otherwise invisible internal states" (Hollway and Jefferson 2005a).

Background

Vince was a married man in his 40s with three

children, who lived on a council housing estate in the North of England. He had been a lorry driver for twelve years, but, at the time of the interview, had been off work for five months with depression. Though the interviews were originally to be conducted as part of a project on anxiety and fear of crime, the focus became why Vince was sick.

One Monday morning, Vince got up and felt "absolutely shocking like". When his wife called the doctor, despite the protests, Vince started to panic.

Very quickly in the first interview, without prompting from the interviewer, Vince moved from describing his illness to talking about "that court case". This is the free association element of the FANI method.

The court case related to a situation when Vince left the keys in his unlocked van parked outside the company offices (company policy). The van was stolen, but the insurance company would not pay the claim because the keys were left in the van. Initially Vince admitted to the insurance company his mistake, but when his employer took the insurers to court, Vince was under pressure to lie about the keys to save his job. It was three years between the event and the court case, and after that he became ill. The employer won the court case and Vince's job was assured. Also afterwards the employer gave Vince money for lying in court.

Vince explains his depression as the worry of the events finally catching up with him. But Hollway and Jefferson felt that his own explanation was "insufficient" because Vince did not feel better after the court case was resolved.

Hollway explored the background more. For a number of years, Vince had been working very long hours under pressure of "do it or leave it". His willingness to stay in such an unpleasant job was linked to his investment in the identity position of "family man", and, in particular, as the breadwinner.

Interpretations

Following in the tradition of psychodynamics, early childhood experiences are seen as important. In Vince's case, his father was a "heavy drinker" who had "no time for the family", while his mother was hard-working. Vince was determined that "there's no way I'm gonna be like 'im". Thus the identity now as breadwinner and supporter of the family at whatever cost. The narratives of hard work and family-centredness were key.

Hollway and Jefferson emphasised a number of strands as to why he stayed in the job - the investment as breadwinner for the above individual reasons and the general male discourses as well as the practicality of limited job opportunities in the 1980s in Northern England.

In psychodynamic terms, Hollway and Jefferson focused on his "disidentification with a failed and rejected father, and his identification with his hard-working and long-suffering mother" (p156).

In the second interview, the issue of committing perjury in the court case was developed.

Despite the bullying from the boss, Vince was loathed to say bad things against him, though Hollway admitted she felt "fury at the boss, presumably an introjection of Vince's suppressed anger" (p158). The relationship with the boss can be described as a replaying of the relationship with the father. The similarity is the intimidation of Vince by both men, and the difference is that the boss supported Vince which his father did not (the boss gave Vince the job after three years of unemployment).

The illness can be interpreted as a cutting off from the job, but also from the boss who has betrayed him as Vince felt his father had done.

Vince emphasised his honesty, and, in particular, the offence of being paid for his perjury: "I've worked for this company twelve years and, for being honest, hard-working, this is what I end up with" (p160). Interestingly, he did not refuse the money, but gave it all to his children.

Hollway and Jefferson concluded: "To feel forced to tell a lie robs him of control, entails a painful re-evaluation of his boss's honesty and undermines his ability to trust.." (p160).

Overall, Vince experiences inner conflict about the job working at three levels:

- i) The "experience of the daily job" - exploitation, dangerous, exhausted, powerless to change vs determination to carry on;
- ii) The "significance of having a respectable job" - being employed, providing for his family vs not being worthless like his father;
- iii) The relationship with his boss - gratitude, trust vs fear, betrayal (figure 2).

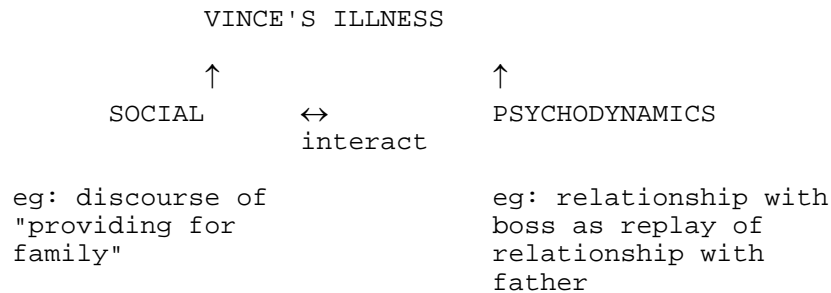


Figure 2 - Social and psychodynamics together in Vince's case.

The sudden illness was the unconscious solution to the conflicts and the inability to consciously give up the job:

By becoming too sick to work, Vince achieves a resolution, not through thought but through his body. This resolution is an elegant one. On the one hand he has not chosen to quit his job. He and others can honestly say that he would be working if he could. His intentions remain unimpeachable. On the other hand, his collapse has achieved that desired-and-feared situation: he does not have to go to work"

(Hollway and Jefferson 2005a p161).

Thus Vince unconsciously chose to leave his job. Wetherell (2005) was less flattering about the conclusion - Vince is presented as a "timid man choosing illness to avoid confrontation with a bullying boss" (p169).

Debate

The interpretation of Vince's behaviour by Hollway and Jefferson is not without critics. Spears (2005), for example, wanted to downplay the role of the unconscious. He argued that the events were painful and Vince was fully aware of them, and confession to others is also painful:

Should we take pauses, avoidances, and changes in emotional tone (etc) as evidence of a struggle with the unconscious, or a struggle of the conscious conflict between dissonant selves; different sides of Vince's identity? (p167).

For Spears, the conflict is a conscious one between the shame of Vince's inability to stand up to the boss

versus the masculine ideals of power and strength. The "claim of unconscious processes is notoriously difficult to sustain.." (p168).

Wetherell (2005), a social constructionist, preferred to explain Vince's interviews as him having "to find a narrative that is persuasive and that positions him in ways that are acceptable to him, his community, and his various actual and potential audiences" (p170). An alternative narrative could have been "a heroic story of derring-do and victorious cheating of authority in collusion with his boss.." (p170).

OTHER RESEARCH EXAMPLES

1. Siblings (Edwards et al 2006)

Traditional psychoanalysis has focused upon the parent-child relationship, and largely ignored the relationship between siblings (except in sibling rivalry) (Lucey 2007). As well as parents introjected to become part of the child's self, so can siblings (especially older ones). Introjection is the unconscious "taking in" of parts or characteristics of the other person to form the self.

Edwards et al (2006) interviewed two of five adult Bangladeshi sisters living in Britain. The sisters idealised their eldest sister, Azra, and dreaded letting her down. This fear of letting Azra down is the introjection of her by the sisters as a "moral guardian", and influenced the sister's behaviour.

This is an example of the psychodynamic side of the social psychoanalytic approach. The social side was the fact that the sisters were in an ethnic and religious (Muslim) minority in Britain, and the effect of those aspects on behaviour.

The psychic process of introjection, for example, "was in constant dynamic interplay with expectations, codes of behaviour and practices tht circulated within the family and in the wider Muslim community" (Lucey 2007 p87).

2. Ethnic Minority Students in British Higher Education (Clarke 2002)

Clarke (2002) interviewed fifteen black and Asian social science students from a university in Southern Britain about their experiences in higher education. He used the biographical interpretative method (similar to FANI) with open-ended questions and interpretation of the

answers by the researcher.

From the interviews, Clarke found examples of projective identification by the students. Projective identification "involves expelling the unpalatable parts of the self into some other, forcing them to feel the way we do, or feel how we feel about them" (Clarke 2002 p180). The idea is linked to the work of Melanie Klein (eg 1993) and Object Relations Theory.

Projective identification can occur in different ways (Rosenfeld 1988):

i) As communication

Clarke described projective identification in an interview with "Colin" (studying economics), who answered the open-ended questions with short answers of single words or sentences. He said he was happy with the course, and problems were experienced by other students. Clarke ended up feeling very frustrated by the interview, and this is taken as the unconscious communication of Colin's "real" feelings. Later Colin opened up and admitted to many negative experiences at the university.

ii) As control of the other's mind

In the case of "Trev", he took over the interview and talked about his interests relating to ethnicity. Clarke admitted that he "felt at one point that Trev was almost trying to force his life onto me in some way" (p184), and "I certainly came away from some interviews feeling traumatized and beaten by the experiences of others which were told with such forceful passion that I could help but feel as well as listen" (p185).

iii) Both of the above together

After a very passionate interview with Mark about his experiences of racism at school and work, Clarke was left traumatised, but also feeling bad for him and wanting to support him (control and communication).

3. Young Masculinities (Frosh et al 2003)

Frosh et al (2002) carried out extensive interviews about "young masculinities" with seventy-eight 11-14-year-old boys in London. A key aspect in the development of core (hegemonic) heterosexual masculinity was the fear of being called "gay" or "effeminate". This research tended to use discourse analytic methods.

Frosh et al (2003) then developed their ideas from

this using psychoanalytic concepts, particularly based on the ideas on Lacan (eg 1977) and Judith Butler (eg 1997). The psychoanalytic principles helped to explain how individuals position themselves in relation to the available discourses.

In particular, boys who deliberately rejected hegemonic masculinity. One interviewee was twelve-year-old Oliver who preferred to play with girls than to conform to playing football with the boys. He suffered with taunts and bullying for this behaviour.

Frosh et al (2003) applied a psychoanalytic interpretation to his behaviour. Oliver had anxiety over sexual contact (and particularly the demands of hegemonic masculinity for "sexual prowess"), and this unconscious anxiety was resolved by being with the girls: "One possibility is that this anxiety drives his resistance to hegemonic masculinity, carrying certain costs (of bullying and exclusion) but also relieving him of the burden of negotiating his sexuality" (p46).

Frosh et al (2003) concluded that "psychoanalytic explorations" can reveal the "unsaid" of interviews, but that there is no "certainty of interpretation".

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) lamented that the "exclusive focus on pathology that dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living" (p5). After fifty years and thirty billion dollars of research, psychologists and psychiatrists are able to help approximately one-third of people (in the USA, for example) who suffer from mental disorders in their lives at some time, but what about helping the others (Seligman et al 2004)?

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) saw the loss of the positive emphasis in psychology as coming after World War II when psychologists in the USA, in particular, found that research grants were given for studying pathology and suffering. Psychology became about repairing damage - damaged families, behaviours, and brains. There seems to be more interest generally in negative than positive things.

Myers (2000) noted that in approximately one hundred years of "Psychological Abstracts", there have been 70 856 articles on depression compared to 2958 on happiness¹. "Relieving the states that made life miserable has relegated building the states that make life worth living to a distant back seat" (Seligman 2003 p126).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) advocated a "science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions..".

Writing at the beginning of the 21st century, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi wanted to produce a new kind of psychology that encouraged positive qualities. Positive psychology (PP) ("an umbrella term"; Seligman et al 2004)) has a number of levels of focus (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000):

i) Subjective level - "valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)" (p5);

ii) Individual level - "positive individual traits" including the capacity for love, forgiveness,

¹ I performed an internet search on 27/02/07 of the words "happiness" and "depression". For depression, Google recorded 89.8 million hits and Yahoo 89.3 million. With the word "happiness", there were 62.1m and 53.6m hits respectively.

spirituality, wisdom, and future mindedness;
iii) Group level - "civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship" (p5). A concern for collective well-being distinguishes PP from humanistic psychology which can be said to place too much emphasis on the self leading to self-centredness.

PP is interested in positive experience (eg: subjective well-being, optimism), positive personality characteristics (eg: creativity and talent, wisdom), and positive communities (eg: social relationships and happiness). However, the aim is not to ignore the negative aspects of life, but to redress the balance in psychology (Linley 2006a). For example, while looking at the factors that lead to depression, PP would also include the factors that buffer against it.

Table 1 lists some of the topics of interest to PP.

- * Subjective well-being/happiness
- * Optimal experience/peak and flow experience
- * Optimism
- * Self-determination: needs for competence, belonging, autonomy
- * Relationship between positive emotions and physical health
- * Wisdom
- * Exceptional performance: creativity and talent

Table 1 - Examples of main topics of interest for Positive Psychology ².

HISTORY

PP can be seen as launched by Martin Seligman's inaugural speech as president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1997 (Linley 2006a).

PP is an approach to psychology "which aims to use scientific psychology to enhance the well-being of both persons and communities" (Stevens 2002 p213). Gable and Heidt (2005) defined it as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions" (p104).

Because of the emphasis on the use of scientific psychology, PP is not the same as humanistic psychology, though the roots of the former are most definitely in the latter.

In the late 1950s, the Association for Humanistic Psychology was set up by, among others, Carl Rogers and

² The areas of PP have been formalised into the six virtues (eg courage) and the twenty-four character strengths (eg authenticity, bravery) (CSV; Peterson and Seligman 2004).

Abraham Maslow as the "third force" in relation to Behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Stevens 2002).

The humanistic approach to psychology laid the groundwork for similar and subsequent ideas about the individual with emphasis on:

- i) Conscious experience - the subjectivity of behaviour;
- ii) Reflexivity - to reflect upon our conscious experience and behaviour;
- iii) Autonomy and choice - contradicting the determination of much of psychology;
- iv) Personal growth - the ability to improve ourselves psychologically;
- v) Authenticity - to be aware of the reality of existence both good and bad;
- vi) Meaning - the core of psychology is the search for meaning, even a spiritual dimension.

These ideas can be summarised in the "existential issues" (Stevens 1996). These are the experience of time passing and the finiteness of it; choice and responsibility; and the search for meaning. The whole emphasis is upon the experience of the individual (experiential psychology - Stevens 1996 or phenomenological psychology - Langridge 2007).

A "rotten-to-the-core" view (Seligman 2003) dominates Western thinking, and so the study of positive traits is treated with suspicion. The "real" characteristics are negative, it is believed. This was best seen in Freud's description of civilisation as a thin veneer over the conflicts of infantile sexuality and aggression.

PP wants to challenge this belief that all good aspects of human beings have underlying bad motivations (eg: co-operation is just ally-building or kin selection in evolutionary theory). Seligman (2003) distinguished three "desirable lives" with which PP can contradict negative views of humanity:

a) The pleasant life - "a life that successfully pursues the positive emotions about the present, past and future" (p127). These positive emotions include satisfaction (with the past), optimism (about the future), and confidence (in the present);

b) The good life - "using your strengths and virtues

to obtain abundant gratification in the main realms of life" (p127). Gratification here refers to positive emotions and activities in the present that create "flow" or "peak" experiences;

c) The meaningful life - this is the use of an individual's strengths for the benefit of the wider community. This aspect of PP counters the accusation of it being self-centred and self-indulgent.

HAPPINESS/SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Benefits of Happiness

The pursuit of happiness holds an honoured position in American society, beginning with the Declaration of Independence, where it is promised as a cherished right for all citizens. Today, the enduring US obsession with how to be happy can be observed in the row upon row of popular psychology and self-help books in any major bookstore and in the millions of copies of these books that are sold
(Lyubomirsky et al 2005b p111).

A whole list has been compiled of the benefits of being happy. These include larger "social rewards" (eg less chance of divorce), higher income, greater work productivity, bolstered immune system, and more co-operative (Lyubomirsky et al 2005b).

Lyubomirsky et al (2005a) looked at the relationship between happiness and "life success". They examined 225 papers including cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies. Their conclusions were positive correlations between happiness (or positive affect) and sociability, altruism, liking of self and others, strong immune systems, and effective conflict resolution skills, but less so for original thinking.

There was no relationship for superior coping abilities, greater popularity, and healthier behaviour with happiness. However, happiness can sometimes lead to poor problem-solving generally, or more efficient problem-solving on complex tasks depending on the situation.

Overall, Lyubomirsky et al said: "our review provides strong, albeit not conclusive, evidence that happiness may, in many cases, lead to successful outcomes, rather than merely following from them" (p840).

What is Happiness?

Happiness ³is a "condition over and above the absence of unhappiness" (Seligman et al 2004). But are people happy? Myers and Diener (1996) aggregated the data from nearly 1000 studies on happiness and life satisfaction with over one million people in nearly fifty countries. The average rating was 6.75 out of ten, where 0 equals "very unhappy", 5 is neutral, and 10 is "very happy". Self-reports, then, lean towards the positive slightly.

It has been noticed that after a certain level of income and material wealth, happiness does not increase with more income. This is the situation of many rich (Western) countries, particularly in the USA. Individuals have so much materially than previous generations, but are not necessarily happier.

Common sense would suggest that happiness is the product of more positive affect than negative ones. This is a hedonic approach in terms of the philosophical origins of happiness. PP tends towards an eudaimonic approach, where happiness is viewed in the context of fulfilling our potential (self-actualisation) ⁴ rather than specific positive or negative affects (Linley 2006b).

The hedonic approach would encourage a shying away from negative things including thinking about death, for example. But for PP, happiness will come from addressing the "existential issues". The realisation of the inevitability of death is not to be avoided, but embraced because the individual is then free to make the most of their limited time.

What Makes a Person Happy?

At an individual level, what makes a person happy? Myers (2000) examined the research on three factors that could be linked to happiness:

i) Wealth

It seems that "once comfortable.. more money

³ Diener (2000) preferred to talk about subjective well-being (SWB) rather than happiness. It is wider than happiness, in some senses, though there is overlap. SWB includes life satisfaction, satisfaction with important areas of life (eg work), and positive and negative affect.

⁴ Maslow (1973) introduced the idea of "self-actualisation" and "peak experiences", while Csikszentmihalyi (1992) coined the term "flow experiences". In both cases, they were talking about special moments of fulfilment.

provides diminishing returns on happiness" (p59). For example, economic data from the USA shows that average income has tripled in the last fifty years, but the percentage of people rating themselves as "very happy" has stayed at about one-third throughout. For the USA, Myers (2000) concluded: "Our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being" (p61).

ii) Close relationships

Generally, satisfactory close relationships (and more of them) are associated with happiness.

Pooling US data for 1972-96, Myers found that married men and women were most likely to report being "very happy", followed by a long way behind by "never married", and lastly divorced and separated. Happiness and marriage is a two-way street: marriage produces happiness while happy people are attractive to marry.

iii) Faith

Again using US survey data (1972-96), Myers showed that those with a deep faith (whatever the religion) were happier. For example, of those attending religious ceremonies more than once a week, nearly half reported being "very happy" compared to only a quarter of those who attended less than once a month.

Improving Happiness

Lyubomirsky et al (2005b) preferred to focus upon the "chronic happiness level", which refers to a particular period of a person's life rather than momentary happiness. This type of happiness has three components:

- a) Genetic set point (accounts for 50% of variation between individuals) as shown in MZ (monozygotic) twin studies;
- b) Circumstances (10% of variation) eg: personal events, "life status variables" (eg: job security, income);
- c) Intentional activity (40% of variation).

This last component is the one that can be changed to increase happiness. In other words, individuals can choose to do certain things to improve their lives.

The recommendation of Lyubomirsky et al (2005b) is to choose activities that fit our interest and values, to invest effort in them, and to pursue varied "happiness-boosting activities" ⁵.

Practically, "happiness-boosting activities" include performing acts of kindness for others, appreciating what we have (eg: through keeping a gratitude log), and using our "signature strengths" (good characteristics) more (Lindley 2006b).

Lyubomirsky et al (2004 quoted in Lyubomirsky et al 2005b) found that students who performed five acts of kindness on one day per week over a six month period or counted their blessings once a week showed large increases in short-term happiness compared to their baseline measures and to control groups (table 2).

<u>HAPPINESS-BOOSTING ACTIVITY</u>	<u>INTERVENTION GROUP</u>	<u>CONTROL GROUP</u>
Five acts of kindness on one day per week	+0.4	-0.2
Counting blessings once a week	+0.15	-0.17

(After Lyubomirsky et al 2005b)

Table 2 - Changes in well-being from baseline over six months.

Seligman et al (2004) proposed that happiness has three elements, and psychology can improve each of them:

i) Pleasure (positive emotions) - Positive emotions can be cultivated in different areas including encouraging forgiveness (about the past), mindfulness (about the present), and building hope (about the future);

ii) Engagement - The key is to become absorbed in gratifying activities, whatever they may be. There are no short-cuts here: "We must involve ourselves fully, and the pursuit of gratification requires us to draw on character strengths such as creativity, social intelligence, sense of humour, perseverance, and an appreciation of beauty and excellence" (p1380);

⁵ Brickman and Campbell (1971) introduced the idea of the "hedonic treadmill" to cover the situation where individuals soon get used to improvements in life (and wealth), and any initial happiness is lost. On the other side, individuals adapt to negative aspects of life, and overall there is a hedonic neutrality in the long run. Thus the need for new activities and change to maintain benefits in happiness.

iii) Meaning - Happiness here comes from "something larger than ourselves": finding meaning in "knowledge, goodness, family, community, politics, justice or a higher spiritual power" (Seligman et al 2004).

The use of PP ideas as an intervention to improve happiness has been tested in controlled studies. Controlled studies are used in order to distinguish any findings from the unfounded claims of many in the "self-improvement industry" (Seligman et al 2005).

Seligman et al (2005) designed an internet-based randomised controlled trial using five happiness exercises and one placebo control exercise over one week. An example of a happiness exercise would be gratitude-building (eg: writing a letter to someone who has been especially kind to you), and the control exercise was keeping a journal about early memories. There were 577 adult participants recruited (and 411 completed the study).

Levels of happiness were measured on the Steen Happiness Index (SHI) 920 items and five choices in each case), and a measure of depression.

The different happiness exercises varied in their success in improving happiness over time, but overall the exercises were more efficacious than the control condition. Two exercises (writing down three good things per day, and using signature strengths in a new way) showed improvements over six months. The gratitude letter showed improvements over one month. Adherence to the exercises was key to improving happiness.

But happiness is also affected by external factors outside the control of the individual, like economic changes. In a survey of twelve European countries, it was found that happiness ratings declined with increasing inflation and unemployment, and increased with increasing wealth (gross domestic product; GDP) and unemployment benefits (Di Tella et al 2001). While in areas of Switzerland where local democracy worked efficiently, there was greater happiness than areas of poor efficiency (Frey and Stutzer 2000).

Very Happy People

If there are limited studies on happy people (compared to unhappy ones), then studies of very happy people "do not exist". Diener and Seligman (2002) rectified this problem with a term-long study (51 days) of 222 students at the University of Illinois. The individuals were divided into three groups (very happy, average, least happy) based on a selection of measures

both self and peer reported.

The study concentrated, in the main, on the happiest 10% of the sample (n = 22), the unhappiest 10% (n = 24), and a group in the middle (n = 60). The very happy group (compared to the very unhappy group) reported greater life satisfaction (mean 29.4 vs 15.7 out of 35), had never thought about suicide in their lives (mean 0.2 vs 1.5 out of 5), recalled more good events in two minutes (mean 10.5 vs 0.9), and reported more positive emotions each day (mean 3.7 vs 0.3 out of 6).

Differences in behaviour were evident between the very happy and the very unhappy groups, though it is not clear the direction of causality. The very happy students spent more time with others and rated their social relationships more positively. Do good relationships cause happiness, or does being happy cause good relationships? This study is only a correlational one.

Evaluation of the Study of Happiness

Any desire to study happiness is faced by a number of criticisms. Veenhoven (2003) countered the criticisms:

- Happiness is undefinable - Veenhoven defined it as "the overall appreciation of one's life as a whole", and it is different to quality of life;
- Happiness is unmeasurable - valid questionnaires have been designed to measure it including the concept of "happy life-years" (Veenhoven 1996);
- Happiness is only temporary - some aspects of happiness are temporary (eg ecstasy), but other aspects show great stability over time;
- Only a few people are happy while the majority are not - in surveys, the majority of people report themselves as satisfied to some degree. However, whether that is the same as happiness, and whether such survey findings can be trusted are open to question;
- Happiness is relative - Veenhoven (1991) argued that happiness is not the product of cognitive evaluation (which compares the self to others), but it is a spontaneous affective state. Thus it is not relative;
- Happiness spoils individuals - research shows that happiness is beneficial to individuals (eg: living longer), and in society generally (eg: promoting altruism);

- Social justice is more important than happiness - for Veenhoven, happiness will lead to social justice.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Balanced Time Perspective

Time perspective (TP) is how the individual focuses upon different time frames (ie: present, past, or future), and how each time frame is viewed (ie positive or negative). It can be measured by the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) (Zimbardo and Boyd 1999) ⁶, which has five underlying factors, and is associated with particular behaviours (table 3):

- Past-negative: focusing on negative personal experiences; eg: "I think about the bad things that have happened to me in the past", "I think about the good things I have missed out in life". This TP is associated with depression, anxiety, happiness, and low self-esteem;
- Past-positive: reflecting upon positive experiences and relationships; eg: "It gives me pleasure to think about the past", "I get nostalgic about my childhood. Goes with high self-esteem and happiness;
- Present-hedonistic: enjoyment in the now and little thought of the consequences; eg: "Taking risks keeps my life from becoming boring", "I do things impulsively". An emphasis on sensation and novelty-seeking;
- Present-fatalistic: hopelessness and external locus of control; eg: "My life path is controlled by forces I cannot influence", "Often luck pays off better than hard work". Associated with depression and anxiety;
- Future orientation: working for the future and ignoring present enjoyment: "I complete projects on time by making steady progress", "I am able to resist temptation when I know that there is work to be done". Behaviours shown include conscientiousness and desire for consistency.

The type of TP emphasis that an individual has is linked to many behaviours including health, delinquency, educational achievement, risk-taking, and motivation

⁶ Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) used a wide range of students (mainly psychology) from universities in California and a small group from local schools (n = 1034) to develop the ZTPI.

(Boniwell and Zimbardo 2003). Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) found two significant correlations between "hours of studying per week" and TP - positive for future orientation ($r = 0.28$), and negative for present-hedonistic ($r = -0.15$).

<u>BEHAVIOUR</u>	<u>PAST- NEGATIVE</u>	<u>PRESENT- HEDONIST</u>	<u>FUTURE</u>	<u>PAST- POSITIVE</u>	<u>PRESENT- FATALIST</u>
Depression	+.59	+.20	-.19	-.17	+.37
Novelty-seeking	+.29	+.57	-.41	ns	+.28
Self-esteem	-.48	ns	+.13	+.28	-.28

(After Zimbardo and Boyd 1999)

Table 3 - Significant correlations between TP and three behaviours.

In a naturalistic study, Epel et al (1999), found that unemployed individuals living in shelters for the homeless varied in their behaviour depending on the TP taken. Those individuals with future TP were motivated to find employment, and believed that their efforts would achieve something. Individuals with present TP tended to find activities to fill the time (like watching television), and had little faith in their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy negatively correlated with length of stay at the Redwood City Family Shelters in California among the 82 adults studied. Individuals high on future TP had shorter periods of homelessness, were more likely to enrol in educational courses as a solution to unemployment, and reported positive benefits from their experiences of homelessness. But individuals high on present TP were better at finding temporary housing, though there was no difference between the groups in finding permanent housing. Overall, TP can be very important in how individuals respond to crises.

However, it is important not to be excessively oriented towards one type of TP. The answer is balance between them, and between having too little or too much time: "In an optimally balanced time perspective, the past, present and future components blend and flexibly engage, depending on a situation's demands and our needs and values" (Boniwell and Zimbardo 2003 p130). Balance would be gaining three high scores (eg past-positive, present-hedonistic, and future orientation) on the ZTPI, while unbalanced is a very high score on only one type.

Exceptionally happy people combine past-present and present-hedonistic as appropriate (Diener and Seligman 2002).

Optimal Experiences (and personal growth)

Optimal experience is a state of consciousness characterised by high concentration, enjoyment, perceived control of the situation, and optimism in the face of high environmental demands (Csikszentmihalyi 2000). It is similar to "flow" or "peak" experiences. Notice that it occurs in demanding situations that require concentration to deal with. Optimal experiences come from rising to a challenge (not too easy or too difficult) with a degree of skill to overcome it. For example, rock climbers choose climbs that are challenging, and the optimal experience is felt during, and just after, reaching the peak of the climb.

There are also examples of optimal experiences in situations usually assumed to be negative, and far from the possibility of such experiences.

Delle Fave and Massimini (2003) found reports of optimal experiences among different groups of Italian adults with physical disabilities. For example, among 55 of 56 individuals with congenital disabilities (eg motor impairments), and among 41 of 45 individuals who became disabled in adolescence (eg paraplegic). The authors concluded that "physical impairments, rather than preventing development, can help individuals discover new opportunities for optimal experience and can foster personal growth" (p134).

In another surprising sit, Linley and Joseph (2003) reported positive changes after extreme trauma. Joseph et al (1993) had interviewed survivors of the "Herald of Free Enterprise" sinking ⁷. Though 46% reported negative changes in their lives, there were 43% who said positive things had come from the experience, like "I live every day to the full now". Experiencing trauma can produce a change in worldview, a boost in self-efficacy from surviving, and a new energy for good causes.

But "trauma survivors embrace this positive approach to life within a context of tragic hopefulness. They know at first hand the ups and downs, and the limits of human life" (Linley and Joseph 2003 p135). Being aware of the fragility of life is part of being authentic.

⁷ This roll-on roll-off car ferry sank off Zeebrugge, Belgium on 6th March 1987 killing 193 people (www.plimsoll.org; accessed 04/03/07).

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions, like happiness, joy and contentment, are a key part of PP, and the process of human flourishing (personal growth). Not only for their own sake, but because studies are finding that positive emotions lead to "life success" (Lyubomirsky et al 2005a).

Fredrickson (2006) proposed the broaden-and-build theory to explain the benefits of positive emotions in an evolutionary framework. Positive emotions evolved to encourage individuals to explore and build when life is going well, while negative emotions are related to survival in times of threat and hardship.

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) believed that positive emotions had to be experienced in a ratio of 2.9:1 or more compared to negative emotions to have any long-term benefits.

EVALUATION OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

If the emphasis of psychology for too long was upon the negative, then it is equally undesirable to focus upon the positive only (Held 2002). Held was concerned about "mindless optimism" and the "make-your-own-reality-by-thinking-the-right-positive-thoughts" movement in the USA which downplays the benefits of negative thinking and facing reality: "After all, life is hard for everyone at least some of the time, and surely therapists of all stripes must be prepared to take that fact seriously" (p986).

If PP is positive, does that mean the rest of psychology is negative? Gable and Heidt (2005) refuted this suggestion: "In fact, it is because psychology (which is mostly neutral, but with more negative than positive topics) has been so extraordinarily successful that the imbalance, the lack of progress on positive topics has become so glaring" (p107).

Another criticism relates to how PP decides what is positive or good. Diener and Suh (1997) used the criteria: the individual's choice, satisfaction, and based on values and norms. But, as with humanistic psychology, PP tends to concentrate on making the individual happy (whatever is said about changing institutions). This is an individualistic preoccupation which fits well with Western thinking and society. It is doubtful that individuals living in the poorer parts of the world, and suffering from Western exploitation, would appreciate PP.

Defenders of PP would probably say that counting your blessings, for example, would help anybody in any situation become happier. But, in bad situations, this is just learning to adapt when efforts should be made to change the situation.

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Though Phenomenological Psychology (Ph P) ⁸ is not "officially" part of Positive Psychology, it has similar origins in humanistic psychology. It is more of the modern baton-carriers of the anti-science ideas of humanistic psychology, whereas Positive Psychology uses scientific evidence to support its principles.

At the heart of Ph P (and other descendants of humanistic psychology) is experience. It is about investigating what it is like to live in the world, and the meanings made of it.

With origins in phenomenological and existential philosophy, Ph P has a number of core ideas:

i) Individuals are unique (in terms of their own meanings from experience), and are actively choosing their lives.

ii) "Being-in-the-world" ("Dasein"; Heidegger 1962)

The individual is not separate from the world, their experiences though personal are part of being in the world. This is further enforced by the term "lifeworld" for "the inseparability between the world which forms the setting for one's life and the subjective experience of that life" (Hollway 2007 p131). What is studied in Ph P is the "lifeworld in its appearing" (Ashworth 2003).

Ashworth (2003) described the seven "fractions" (elements) of the lifeworld:

- Selfhood - "the person's sense of agency, and their feeling of their own presence and voice.." (p148);
- Sociality - relating to others;
- Embodiment - feeling about own body: "The body is the vehicle of being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962 p82);
- Temporality - sense of time;
- Spatiality - sense of physical geography, like the concept of place;

⁸ Many of the ideas classed specifically as Ph P have developed from work at the University of Sheffield in the last quarter of a century (Ashworth 2003).

- Project - the carrying out of the activities that an individual is committed to;
- Discourse - the language used to describe these processes and elements.

Charlesworth (2000), in researching the experience of being a working class man in Rotherham, Yorkshire, talked of "locating the flesh through inhabiting a particular social realm" (p65). This is similar to the idea of "incarnate subjectivity" (Merleau-Ponty 1962). These are all jargonised ways of getting at what it is like to live as a particular person.

iii) The methods used are qualitative, but specifically guided by certain principles (Husserl 1970):

- Epoche (bracketing) - the researcher must bracket off their assumptions and attempt neutrality when interviewing, though it will always be imperfect;
- Focus on describing subjective experience not explaining it. But, for Ashworth (2003), all Ph P is interpretive in the sense of "elucidation". There is a strand of interpretive Ph P (eg van Manen 1990);
- "Horizontalisation" - treating all information from the participant equally and, as a researcher, not to prioritise some above others.

It is sometimes called the existential-phenomenological method (eg Giorgi 1985).

Mastain (2006) described the use of the method in a study of spontaneous altruism:

- Bracketing previous knowledge and ideas about altruism in order to "stay open to the data";
- Looking at the whole interview first to get an overview;
- Breaking the transcript into smaller "meaning units";
- Analysis of these units to see what is implicitly being said. These are known as the "transformed meaning units";
- Looking for overall patterns and themes.

EMBODIMENT

The experience of being in a physical body is a key part of the lifeworld, and thus of great interest in Ph P. "There are many manifestations of the body and it is

because of this that we often think dualistically - separating body and mind - when in reality all we have is an intelligent body [Nietzsche 1961]: body and mind are one and the same, not simply biology; we are our body and, through this, perform selfhood" (Finlay and Langridge 2007 p186).

Ph P draws out two ideas in embodiment - bodily consciousness, and the body-world interaction.

a) Bodily consciousness

There is a difference between the subjective body ("body-subject") which is the "body-as-it-is-lived" (Merleau-Ponty 1962), and the "body-object". The first is the subjective experience of our bodies, and the latter, the public version - the body peered at leered at, admired, criticised, or investigated by others (Finlay 2006).

Sartre (1969) made a third distinction - bodily self-consciousness: "I exist for myself as a body known by the Other" (p351). Awareness of the body through an awareness of the view of others.

The nature of bodily consciousness changes with physical illness in Western society because much of the emphasis is upon the "body-object", usually through medical science. Ph P wants to understand the "body-subject" of the individual who is physically ill. For example, Finlay (2003) interviewed "Ann" who suffered from multiple sclerosis (MS) to discover what living with the condition was like, particularly the difference between her experiences and the medical view. For instance, when she is not able to control her right arm (through loss of nerve impulses), Ann described it as having "a life of its own".

b) Body-world interconnection

The interaction between the body and the world does not stop at the skin boundary, but the "bodiliness" extends beyond the physical boundaries. For example, an object thrown is part of the bodiliness even though it is physically separate from the individual. There is a complex intertwining between the body and the world.

This can be seen in the experience of pregnancy. Iris Young (1988) described the experiences of her body changing: "I move as though I can squeeze around chairs.. only to find my way blocked by my own body sticking out in front of me, in a way not me.." (quoted in Finlay and Langridge 2007 p190).

EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH

1. Ashworth and Ashworth (2003) Lifeworld of an Alzheimer's disease sufferer

Ashworth and Ashworth wanted to discover the experience of a woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease, even when such individuals are treated as beyond understanding. A desire to "thoroughly humanise the way elderly people with dementia are envisioned" (p180).

The sufferer continues to be a person with a unique lifeworld, and is a self "in the sense of being the centre - the point of view - on her physical and psychological world" (p191) despite how bad the illness becomes.

Understanding another to be a "person" requires three features of sociality, which are challenged by dementia:

- To know that another person is "a minded being like myself". The assumption of the other as an "alter ego";
- The world is shared by all - it is intersubjective;
- Taking the position of another person ("reciprocity of perspectives").

The Ashworths argued, with great conviction, for listening to what the Alzheimer's disease sufferer says. It is not a question of the factual accuracy of the words, but the insight that it gives to the lifeworld. For example:

When the sufferer from dementia routinely asserts that "nobody has been" - though it is objectively the case that there has been a succession of visitors to the house - we may have an expression of loneliness in the face of lack of constant companionship (p186).

To ignore the factual accuracy and listen to what is said is part of the bracketing process by the researcher (or carer). Bracketing also requires the setting aside of expectations from medical science about dementia, and to pay attention to the current experience of the experiencer.

2. Mastain (2006) Spontaneous Altruism

The research on altruism and helping behaviour has traditionally concentrated upon the factors involved in why people do these behaviours. This research aimed to investigate the lived experience of individuals with

performed acts of spontaneous altruism.

Three individuals (who were friends or associates) were interviewed for thirty minutes each about an act of spontaneous altruism. Spontaneous altruism was defined as "an act in which they assisted someone else without considering how their act of service would benefit them" (p33). Two of the acts related to helping homeless individuals, and the other, individuals in an automobile accident.

Analysis of the interviews produced fifteen themes. For example, "a compelling desire to alleviate the other's suffering", "identification and empathy with the individuals in need", and "increasing connection to and sense of responsibility for the individuals in need".

The second theme is shown by this statement by one of the interviewees: "I think part of what grabbed me, was that I felt like I could have been in that if I hadn't had the support of my family. I could put myself in their situation and wanted to help" (p38).

The interviewee who helped at the automobile accident, Mastain believed she experienced a flow experience "where her senses were heightened.. she found herself hyper-focused on meeting the needs of the individuals she was assisting" (p41).

3. Other Examples of Research

- Eatough and Smith (2006) "Marilyn" and anger

The researchers interviewed "Marilyn" (30 year-old married mother) for over four hours in two interviews. She had a history of anger and aggression. The researchers wanted to discover the "richness and complexity of Marilyn's meaning making" using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

For example, she said about her anger: "I can't understand why I feel violent and it's really confusing. I think, I feel like a scrambled egg in my head you know" (p126).

- Lydall et al (2005) Bereavement

These researchers interviewed three South African women, whose adult child had died of an AIDS-related illness, about their experiences of bereavement. A number of common themes emerged from the subjective experience of the women: eg feelings of emptiness, and the pain of loss. It is a very powerful article which gives insight into the nature of the experience of bereavement.

EVALUATION

The language used in Ph P is jargonised, and based upon philosophical ideas. Thus it is not always clear, as shown by this quote from Merleau-Ponty (1962) describing spatiality: "One's own body is the third term, always tacitly understood, in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space" (quoted in Ashworth 2003 p149).

The great strength of this approach is the desire to listen to individuals, and find out about their subjective experiences, particularly in the case of individuals with physical illness where they are treated as their illness and little else (eg Alzheimer's disease sufferers). The attempt to see the world from their point of view.

But Ph P tends to describe rather than explain behaviour, and so is limited in the subject areas of psychology where it is used. However, Langridge and Butt (2004) did propose a phenomenological approach to the fundamental attribution error (FAE) in social psychology. They described the experience of the FAE in terms of anticipating others' actions, and "the way in which people construct meaning in the social world as part of their project".

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